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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the notion of "error" in linguistics and language teaching theory and its potential application to error correction in the second language classroom is examined. Definitions of "error" in psycholinguistics, native speech, and English second language instruction are discussed, and the relationship of interlanguage competence and "errors" and "mistakes" is analyzed. It is argued that existing theoretical distinctions between "error" and "mistake" are not being contextualized in appropriate correction in the classroom, and that finer distinctions in categorizing errors could lead to more suitable and effective methods of correction. A system for classifying errors is proposed. The system is based on theory and on data gathered in the English second-language classroom. Four complementary ways of categorizing error are outlined: (1) as error vs. mistake; (2) as a linguistic phenomenon (grammatical, discourse, phonological, or lexical); (3) by gravity of the error (interfering with intelligibility or communication, stigmatizing or irritating, common, or high-frequency); and (4) by difficulty of correction. (Contains 48 references.) (MSE)

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NOTIONS OF 'ERROR' AND APPROPRIATE CORRECTIVE TREATMENT

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This paper discusses the relationship between the notion of 'error' in linguistics and language teaching theory and its potential application in terms of error correction in the classroom. It is the author's contention that existing theoretical distinctions between 'error' and 'mistake' are not being contextualized in appropriate corrective treatment in classroom practice, and that the adoption of finer distinctions in categorising errors could engender more suitable methods of correction. Presenting data elicited from the advanced learner classroom, the latter half of this paper demonstrates how error categories can be further refined for error correction purposes and argues for contextualized treatment of the suggested categories.

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1. Introduction

The term 'error' is used in a variety of ways in linguistics and language teaching theory, in error analysis research, in English language teaching (ELT) including Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), and not least in the ordinary classroom. It is noticeable in particular that the term tends to be interpreted differently when applied to Native Speakers or to Non-Native Speakers of a language (for our purposes, of English). Although 'error' has been clearly defined in error analysis research and in ELT, interpretation and usage of this term specifically for error correction purposes has nevertheless been less than systematic.

The present paper proposes a system for categorising errors which is feasible and appropriate and specifically oriented towards the classroom correction of errors. The system derives from Hendrickson's (1981) proposals, with some modifications and additions developed on the basis of data gathered in the ESL classroom.

The next two sections clarify the notions of 'error' versus 'mistake' in linguistic and language teaching theory and in relation to interlanguage (IL) competence. This is followed by a description of categories of error designed specifically for error correction purposes.

2. Concepts of 'error'

2.1 'Error' in Psycholinguistics and in NS Speech

In terms of Native Speaker (NS) speech, the term 'error' as defined by Crystal (1980) refers more to what is known as a 'mistake', or 'a slip of the tongue' in spontaneous speech or writing, attributable to a malfunctioning of the brain. In the late 60's and early 70's, speech perception experts (e.g. Laver (1970), Boomer and Laver (1968)) defined 'slips of the tongue' as a reflection of temporary slips and went on to show that these can be plausibly explained as the interaction of elements occurring in speech simultaneously and temporarily. Laver (1970) even claims that spontaneous NS speech is far from 'error'-free and is full of hesitations, signals, pauses, vocalisations, and fillers such as 'ums', 'ahs', 'ers' (Goldman-Eisler 1968, Siegman and Pope 1965). These 'errors' reflect to a large degree language planning before speech and grammatical

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encoding. The monitoring function, as revealed in the act of correcting a slip of the tongue, is in almost all cases automatic in NS speech and allows for the detection and correction of errors by the speaker himself (Laver 1970).

The distinction between 'error' and 'mistake' was made clear by Corder (1981) who characterises 'mistakes' in spontaneous speech or writing as being induced by slips of the tongue, or lapses in memory, arising from physical states and psychological conditions which have little to do with language competence but rather more to do with performance.

However, the term 'error' is commonly assumed to incorporate the notion of a 'mistake'. The use of 'error' as an umbrella term in the ESL classroom compounds the lack of distinction made in practice between 'errors' and 'mistakes', particularly for error correction purposes.

2.2 'Error' in English Language Teaching (ELT)

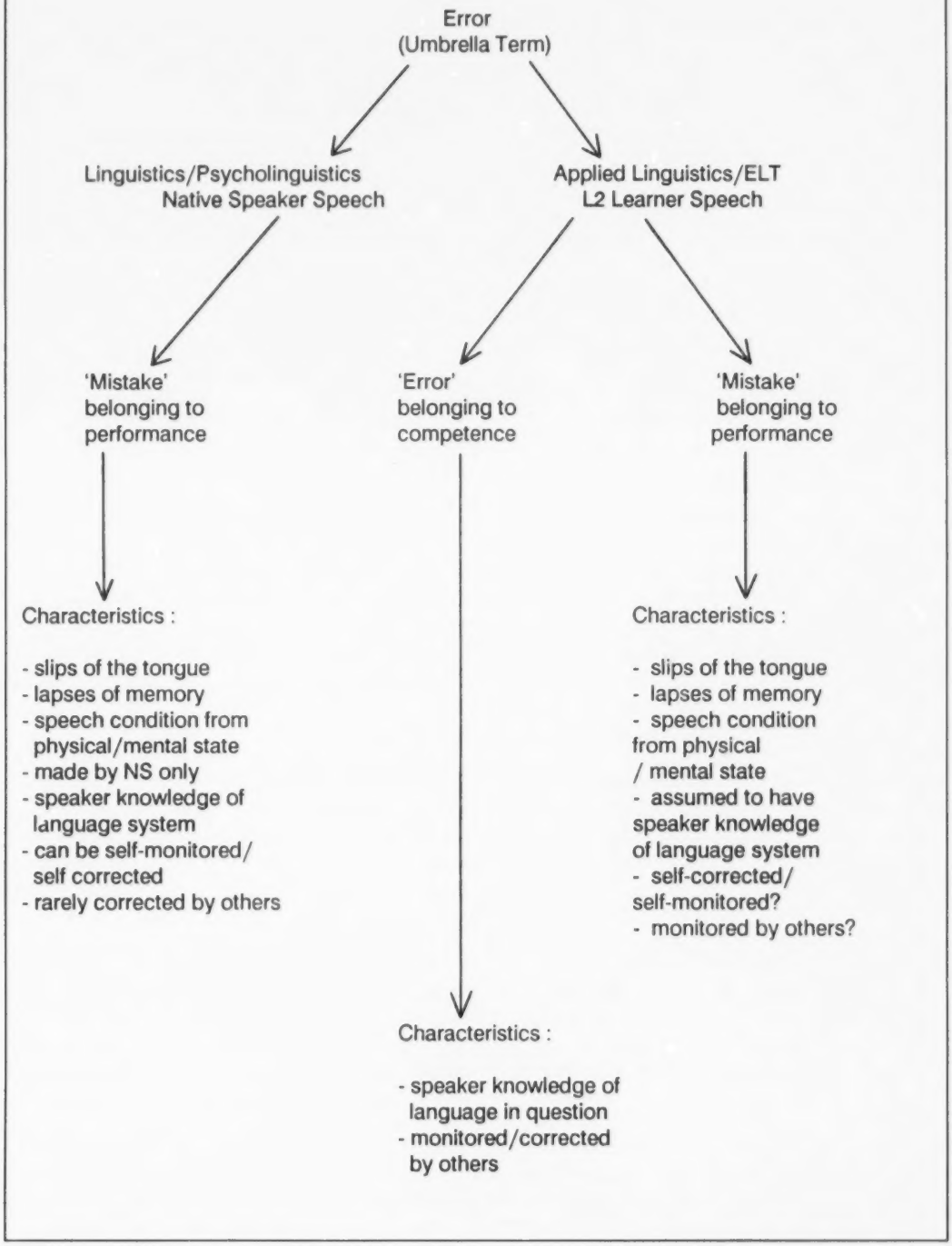
The notion of 'error' in ELT appears to differ markedly from that of 'error' in linguistics/psycholinguistics. In ELT, the term refers to the pedagogical notion of 'error' in the context of language learning and language teaching. In the early 70's, research into 'error' (e.g. by Corder 1967, Selinker 1972, Nemser 1971, Richards 1973, Dulay and Burt 1974) has demonstrated that learner errors are indicative of both the state of the learner's knowledge and of the ways in which the second language is being learned. 'Error' in ELT is a mark of a learner's transitional competence as distinct from 'mistake' or performance error (Corder 1967). Whilst 'error' would be characterized by any deviation from the norm in the language system relating to the L2 learner's competence, 'mistakes' are more closely connected in meaning to the NS term used in psycholinguistics to denote performance-related errors in spontaneous speech or writing (See Figure 1 for graphic represention of above discussion).

3. Interlanguage (IL) competence in relation to 'errors' and 'mistakes'

In terms of IL competence, 'error' in ELT denotes linguistic ignorance or confusion of the language system, and perhaps even fossilization of learner language in some instances. However, genuine fossilization is unlikely to occur in learning environments where further meaningful language input is available and further corrective treatment is given. More often than not, a learner would backslide along the IL continuum when there is declining input or decreasing corrective treatment or when affected by such factors as anxiety or dealing with a new topic matter. In these last cases in particular, one would expect that backsliding along the IL continuum would reflect the production of 'mistakes' rather than 'errors'.

It follows therefore that the 'permeability' factor in learner Interlanguage would need to play a key role in language improvement. Tarone's (1983) underlying assumptions of the IL continuum predict that during the acquisition process, Target Language structures would push to replace the vernacular. Therefore, learner language can only improve if the learner himself is 'permeable' to language input, in terms of both language form and functions, and arguably, to corrective treatment, without which learning/acquisition does not take place. This means that apart from having sufficient suitable input, IL competence may be pedagogically shifted towards the Target Language by the most appropriate form of corrective treatment or by the learner being made aware of language forms and functions which would enable him to monitor himself.

Figure 1 : Notions of error in linguistics / psycholinguistics and ELT



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The term 'monitor' figures in the work of Krashen (e.g. 1976; 1981). Whereas Krashen himself sees the role of the monitor as being confined to conscious 'learning', a process which he sees as having no effect upon language 'acquisition', several other researchers have rejected his claims on these points: Dirven (1990) summarises recent discussion and references. Teaching experience also suggests that conscious attention to errors and mistakes could raise learner awareness of form and function and that this will eventually affect acquisition as well as performance.

Both corrective treatment of errors and fostering of self-monitoring of mistakes are methods that fall within the boundaries of the classroom and the teacher. In fact, Tarone (1983) has convincingly argued that at any given point on the interlanguage continuum, "...learner style shifts as a result of paying more attention to language form" (p.154). I would claim further that the monitoring function, whether by self, by peers or by the teacher would not only focus learner attention upon form and function but would encourage the learner to further monitor himself, thereby creating a learning spiral in which the learner, by the very nature of the task given, constantly verifies his language hypotheses against his 'errors' and/or 'mistakes'. I would further argue that, in a formal learning situation, this kind of 'monitoring' should not just be left to chance or individual initiative. It needs to be guided and appropriately conducted in the context of the classroom.

Commenting on existing error corrective procedures, Johnson (1988:91) states that "techniques (like, perhaps, explanation) for handling errors spring more readily to mind than techniques for handling mistakes", the underlying assumption for correcting only 'errors' being that we do not accept that L2 learners make 'mistakes' at all. But the distinction is there in theory, and recent literature (Bialystok 1982, Ellis 1985) on operating conditions in the classroom that affect the learning environment suggests that L2 learners do indeed make 'mistakes'. And if we accept that L2 learners will make 'mistakes' as well as 'errors', then corrective treatment in classroom practice needs to be accordingly adjusted to our changing concepts. The next part of this paper focuses on an analysis of how 'errors' in general may be broken down into different levels and categories, which may be adopted for error correction purposes in the classroom.

4. Categories of 'error' for error correction purposes

Errors may be categorised along a number of dimensions. Section 4 of the paper presents four complementary ways of classifying errors. Where appropriate, examples are taken from oral data recorded and transcribed from the classroom speech of advanced learners of English in Hong Kong. (Transcription conventions follow Sacks *et al.*, (1974)).

4.1 'Error' vs. 'mistake'

This section summarises the theoretical distinction between 'errors' and 'mistakes' which has been discussed above for error correction purposes in the classroom. For purposes of clarification, we begin by noting that 'errors' arise because the correct form or use of a target item is not part of a speaker or writer's competence, whereas mistakes arise (for reasons of fatigue, stress, inattention, etc.) even though the correct form or use is a part of the user's competence.

Some would argue that second language learners could not possibly make 'mistakes' until their L2 competence is at such an advanced level that they can be labelled "Near Native Speakers". It would seem that the argument may hold good for beginner learners but not for intermediate to advanced learners. It is very likely that intermediate to advanced L2 learners will tend to make

mistakes at the local level (Burt and Kiparsky's (1972) terminology) or at the morpho-syntactic level under new or difficult operating conditions at hand.

Such performance features can be classified as 'mistakes' because the learner's command of the correct form and use of an item (*i.e.* the place of these in the learner's present competence) are not in doubt. Indeed, a 'mistake' is most noticeable in the L2 learner in the simple act of self-correction, as evident in the monitoring function claimed by Morrison and Low (1983), as exemplified (from my own data) in the following utterance of an advanced learner:

S: If the statements of the killer **is are** all false, in the speech of Sei Jai Mihng - then two true - then there'll be two true and one false.

The making of this conceptual distinction between 'error' and 'mistake' is crucial in deciding on subsequent corrective treatment in the classroom.

4.2 Linguistic levels

By linguistic level, we can distinguish four major categories of 'errors' for classroom error correction.

4.2.1 *Grammatical (morpho-syntactic) errors*

The biggest distraction to-date for any language teacher with regard to comprehensive error corrective treatment has been the traditional focus in ELT on the treatment of errors at a grammatical level for both written and spoken language. The tendency has been for teachers to emphasize grammatical accuracy and to provide immediate corrective treatment. At the global level (Burt and Kiparsky's (1972) distinctions of global/local), morpho-syntactic 'errors' can detract from overall intelligibility and may thus have a serious effect on communication. At sentence level, what Burt and Kiparsky would call local 'errors' may often reflect performance 'mistakes' for which immediate teacher correction is not necessarily appropriate. Admittedly, morpho-syntactic errors are an extremely important category for teacher attention. However, there are other categories which deserve more of our attention than hitherto given.

4.2.2 *Discourse errors*

4.2.2.1 Mode of discourse. One of the most important dimensions to corrective treatment in the classroom has been suggested by Hendrickson (1981) who points out that pedagogy needs to be related to modes of linguistic presentation. The approach to correcting errors in the written mode should be quite different from the approach to correcting spoken errors. Each discourse mode demands different corrective treatment at different acceptable periods.

With written errors, teachers need not concern themselves so much with the question of **when** to correct as most corrections are accomplished after the written fact. Teachers could in fact save (or perhaps redeploy) a great deal of time and effort by developing a 'process' approach to writing, whereby students are taken through several drafts of their paper/composition. Each draft is submitted for marking, with the student holding a copy. The teacher (or, in some cases, other student marker) can then indicate by very simple notations (underlining, omission marks etc.) where corrections are needed. The student would then correct what he can, from his own knowledge. Such instances may be considered as 'mistakes'. True 'errors', that are resistant to

correction, can be more fully explained by the teacher. This approach would serve to raise the consciousness of the student with regard to form and function, and would also induce a sense of personal responsibility for 'mistake' correction.

With spoken discourse, the question of **when** to correct becomes vital to the learner's confidence and to the train of conversation. Not only do we have to be concerned with the **timing** of our correction but also the **acceptability** of the method for correcting oral errors of individual students. As a rule, it is extremely difficult for spontaneous conversation and interaction to take place in oral communicative discourse if the exchange is constantly being peppered with corrections from the teacher. As a result, immediate correction of oral errors cannot be encouraged for fear of damaging learner confidence. A more suitable approach would be to encourage learners to be sufficiently conscious of form to be able to monitor themselves and correct their own mistakes. Uncorrected errors which the teacher notes as persistent can be identified and explained by the teacher at a later stage. Inappropriate use of register (e.g. invariant use of full forms in informal speaking contexts) would be one instance here.

4.2.2.2 Rules of discourse. Recent investigations into communication strategies (Faerch and Kaspar 1983) have given rise to possibilities whereby IL errors may be caused by efforts to communicate thus offering the feasibility of error explanation in terms of performance, or discourse rules or rules of speaking.

Errors which indicate IL attempts to communicate reflect incomplete knowledge of the rules of speaking (Hymes 1972) or of address, which may or may not in itself induce grammatical errors. Strategies involving opening and closing moves during conversation, topic changes, and devices for taking the floor may result in the restructuring of conversation, paraphrasing, coining new words and code-switching. An exchange often brings a cross-cultural context to the attempt to communicate and a communication breakdown may be related to cultural interference beyond the morpho-syntactic level which cannot strictly be considered an error.

Consider the exchange below between 3 Cantonese-speaking students in a group problem solving communicative activity (Bank Robbery) in their L2 :

K: Er,so you have any cards mention about Sally's brother Sam Chan?

L: Sam Chan?

T: Yes=

L: =Sam Chan is the dynamite, is the one in charge of the dynamite

K: **Now you listen.** Er, Sally Chan states that her brother Sam was strolling to Hilton Hotel for coffee about 11 p.m. on Thursday November 11th, had seen Frank Man running from the bank.

The perlocutionary force of K's last utterance does not follow as expected, with instructions to other members of the group. K continued by offering information which helped clarify and solve the problem rather than to give instructions. The error reflects K's limited control over the pragmatic use of the language, a dimension that becomes crucial at an advanced stage of L2 learning.

Errors such as the following example by a Cantonese speaker in response to a WH-question in the negative form reveal ignorance of discourse rules in English rather than reflecting learner competence:

Q: You didn't come to class yesterday, did you?

A: Yes.

(As a rule, Native Speaker Cantonese always say 'yes' to negative questions in Cantonese).

The above examples reflect a style shift in the Interlanguage continuum which has been able to accommodate grammatical rules but as yet has to acquire a style that is culturally and pragmatically acceptable. If learners are to be fully competent in a variety of language styles, the possibilities of including correction of discourse errors in the classroom in the list of error categories for corrective treatment should be seriously considered for the future.

4.2.3 *Phonologically-induced errors*

As the term suggests, phonologically-induced errors pertain to errors in pronunciation and/or intonation. Correction of students' phonological errors at an advanced level and particularly with mature learners may risk affront to personal dignity and perhaps even to cultural and national identity. Few would expect students to be able to achieve a Native Speaker sound system in their second language and most L2 learners outside English speaking countries are content with achieving a plateau in their L2 pronunciation. This is an area where fossilization does tend to take place and extreme care needs be taken in a policy of discreet contextualized treatment. However, a communication breakdown can occur if a phonologically-induced error is serious enough to affect intelligibility. This is where **appropriate** corrective treatment is crucial in indicating the speaker's error, as by implicit suggestion from the listener. In some activities, such correction may still not require teacher intervention, as it may be forthcoming from other students.

The group oral discussion below exemplifies a case for correction of a phonologically-induced error which has created a serious communication breakdown when the error produced a change in intended meaning. In this instance, peer correction was implicit in the question that followed :

S: In my card, Mr. Man's father is mentioned

K: Mr. Frank Man's father

S: Father em but he is a (god) dealer in Bali. He had died in September.

P: What is what is...

S: A (god) dealer

P: (God)

S: (God) G.O.L.D. ((spelling it out)) (God)

P: Gold, gold

S: (Hai) ((Cantonese for 'yes')) Yes, gold=

P: =**Gold dealer**

S: Gold dealer

4.2.4 *Lexical errors*

Like morpho-syntactic errors, lexical errors are errors which are habitually corrected by teachers. On the whole it is easy for teachers to correct lexical errors as one only needs to pinpoint the change in meaning and provide the correct word. (While it would not be accurate to conflate 'lexis' and 'semantics', for practical error correction purposes most meaning choices do involve lexis).

However, lexical errors can easily arise in combination with other error categories. An example is from the above sample speaker's error from [gold] to [God], which can be seen as a lexical error that has been phonologically induced. Other examples might involve syntactic restrictions for certain lexical items. Under such circumstances, even if a teacher was aware of all the parameters of an error, it would often be difficult or unhelpful to explain all the complexities of a student's error.

4.3 **Error Gravity**

By definition, error gravity indicates a **criterion for error correction**, indicating the categories and instances of error which need priority attention. Depending on the seriousness of the error, correction can be decided also on the basis of **who** corrects **which** 'error' (a point taken up in 4.5. below).

Two problems here are that the status (as 'error' or 'mistake') of a particular problem is not always clear, and that in any case students may make more genuine 'errors' than it would be helpful to correct at any one time. There appears to be some consensus amongst linguists (George 1972, Hanzeli 1975, Burt 1975, and Valdman 1975) that the degree of the seriousness of error, or **error gravity**, should be given closer attention in corrective treatment of errors. Vann, Meyer and Lorenz' (1984) study on error gravity revealed that despite individual opinions on error gravity, most members of staff tended to perceive errors in relative rather than absolute terms, with reactions also varying according to age and academic discipline. We must now ask what agreement can be reached on the criteria for error gravity itself.

4.3.1 *'Errors' which interfere with intelligibility/communicability*

The question of effects of errors upon intelligibility or communicability has been partly addressed by the work of Burt and Kiparsky (1972) in their suggested distinction between global and local errors. According to Burt and Kiparsky, global errors may have a more serious effect on communication with regard to overall meaning, whilst local errors belong to the level of syntax. Hicks (1983) claims that some local errors such as word omissions and lexical errors may also cause breakdowns in communication and suggest that there is a need to extend the distinction between the global and the local beyond the level of the sentence to include errors in cohesion and coherence. Hicks' suggestion is partly subsumed in our category of discourse errors (see 4.2.2.1 and 4.2.2.2) but further work is needed to make finer distinctions in this area.

On the whole intelligibility would indicate 'message received' on the part of the listener or reader. This may be dependent on many factors such as correct phonology or lexis, accurate syntax etc., on the part of the speaker. Any one of these in an incorrect form could pose problems for the listener/reader to a lesser or greater degree. An NS Cantonese speaker would find it easier to understand a NS Cantonese speaker's English than an NS English Speaker would a L2 Cantonese speaker's English. The interference level decreases when the listener is accustomed to listening to Cantonese-English phonology and the interference level could decrease also when a reader is able to understand the root causes of interference in writing by understanding the L1 mother tongue.

Errors that affect intelligibility would need priority attention from any recipient as, otherwise, communication breakdown occurs.

4.3.2 *Errors which stigmatize or "irritate"*

Error has also been linked to irritability (Johannson 1978, Ludwig 1982), defined by Ludwig (1982: 275) as "the result of the form of the message intruding upon the interlocutor's perception of the communication". Other studies (Santos, 1984, Vann *et al.* 1984) would regard irritation as belonging to the hearer/listener despite the communicability of the message. Thus a criterion of irritability on hearing errors may be assumed to be subjective on the part of the individual.

It appears therefore that stigmatization generally depends upon the **attitude** of the listener. In the early seventies, without defining **what** errors stigmatize **whom** for **what audience**, linguists (Richards 1973, Corder 1975) were in consensus that errors which stigmatize should have priority in corrective treatment. More recently, Ludwig (*loc.cit.*) described the irritation continuum as ranging from an "unconcerned, undistracted awareness of a communicative error to a conscious preoccupation with form". Vann et al.'s (1984) study revealed that people who were "irritated" by student errors were in fact a minority group and that such reactions cannot be assumed to hold true for the majority audience. It would appear that stigmatization of errors in terms of the "irritation" they provoke belongs to judgements about language which are entirely subjective and cannot be taken as universal.

It is sometimes assumed that it is those errors which stigmatize the learner in the eyes of Native Speakers (NS) that need priority attention. But it is quite unclear **which** errors might stigmatize learners in the eyes of **which** Native Speaker. This is not only a question of degree of individual tolerance, but also of actual target norms. There is at present no single monolithic model of NS English speech that could be prescribed as 'acceptable' world-wide, though there are varieties of English which traditionally carry better status than others (Trudgill 1974, 1975; Labov 1966, 1972).

In short, we can only assume that what may stigmatize the learner in the eyes of one Native Speaker may not do so in the eyes of another Native Speaker. Since the argument for correcting errors which stigmatize seems to be entirely judgemental, there cannot be any recommendations as to what constitutes a 'stigmatized' error or how it can be treated.

4.3.3 *Common Errors*

These are errors which affect a large group of students and which can easily be detected. Common errors are likely to be given due attention in class (Holley and King 1971, Olsson 1972). Such errors may be due either to the complexity of the English Language system itself or to L1 interference. This is an area in which teachers have most experience in practice.

The nature of these types of common errors may be rather diverse and teachers would have to adopt a pattern of treatment geared towards the most urgent needs of the learner. Mina Shaughnessy's book (1977) recommends a systematic analysis of errors and appropriate corrective treatment in written composition for teachers. David Bunton's (1988) book on common errors in Hong Kong records errors typically made by Hong Kong students.

One common error in the local context can be demonstrated (from my own data) in the following utterance by student (C) in a group task-based activity where students are attempting to solve a bank robbery. The errors committed here reflect confusion of the passive/active voice:

C: He **was** not **catch** by the police. Therefore he he **may** not **concern.**

The following error reflecting confusion between adjective/noun can also be considered as a common error by Hong Kong students :

K: Yes, my card suggest that there er from the condition of Mr. Wong's body that it had been dragged a long **distant**.

Preposition errors appear to be fairly common in Cantonese mother-tongue speakers. The following example coincides with an attempt at peer correction which entailed implicit correction of two errors. The two together prove too much for the student as he was only able to monitor one error out of the two :

C: I want to know what is the reason for Louis Ho to was to (jurus) **to** his half brother?

S: Jealous of his half brother.

C: What is the reason for him to jealous **to** his half brother?

Common errors are easier to correct through a general explanation to the whole class by the teacher. It is possible but not likely that self-monitoring can take place in the case of common errors for the very reason that these are areas of mistaken knowledge or linguistic confusion on the part of a large number of students. There will be opportunities for peers to correct common errors if they are more proficient in English than the rest of the class.

4.3.4 *High frequency errors*

High frequency error is considered by Dresdner (1973), Bhatia (1974), Allwright (1975) to deserve special priority attention in error correction. 'High frequency' here indicates repeated occurrence of the same error on the part of an individual student: repeated **tokens** are attested of the same error **type**.

Although the **type/token** distinction was applied some time ago in error analysis research (e.g. Duskova 1969, Dulay and Burt 1974), little development has taken place with regard to its potential importance for error correction research. It is too easily assumed that high error frequency also indicates high error gravity. Yet it can be argued that, rather than the frequency of error tokens, it is the nature of each error type - and its place in the learner's developing competence - that should affect our judgements of error gravity and thus of priority for correction.

When it comes to the judgements we convey to our students, through marks or grades, it is important that we avoid the danger of paying excessive attention to repeated error tokens rather than types.

An exchange by students C and S (see under 4.3.3 above) was followed later by a repeated question from student (C):

C: I want to know why why Louis Louis Ho is jealous **to** his half brother? I don't know.

This constitutes another token of the error type "jealous to". Student (W) in another group committed the same error **"That's means"** 11 times in the same discussion on "Bank Robbery" (group problem-solving activity); the same student repeated the error 6 times in another discussion on "Murder Mystery" (group problem-solving activity), twice in "Youth Magazine" (group decision-making exercise) and 6 times in "Seatbelt Promotion" (another group decision-making exercise). This error appeared in recorded oral practice, but had it appeared in written composition, one wonders what final mark the student would have obtained if the teacher had counted all these repeated errors against him.

Both in empirical research and in classroom practice, it is important to be clear whether repeated errors are counted as one error each time or whether an error type is counted as one error only and the remaining tokens of that type discounted. In error assessment and correction, the overall effect of counting repeated errors has significant results for the student who repeats these errors. For most purposes, it seems more important and appropriate to count error types rather than error tokens. However, token counts may be of use where certain errors appear to have a very high frequency of occurrence, since the more an error appears the more the reader/listener may be 'irritated'. (See, however, 4.3.2).

4.4 Correctibility

In principle, all errors are correctible. The question of correctibility here refers to errors being corrected **when** and by **whom?** To the extent that this is under teacher control, decisions are needed about linguistic classification of error, about error gravity, and also about the ease or difficulty of correction for the learner.

The fundamental distinction between 'error' and 'mistake' already indicates a clear-cut correction policy in terms of classroom practice : that 'errors' (reflecting on competence) should normally be corrected (if at all) by teachers, possibly by peers and least likely by self, whereas 'mistakes' (arising only from performance) can normally be addressed by the student and his peers.

At the linguistic level of analysis, it would be deceptively easy to believe that all errors pertaining to the grammatical system will be genuine 'errors' and not 'mistakes', and, as a result, that corrective treatment will be more appropriately given by teachers. This may be far from the truth: morpho-syntactic errors in fact have a strong possibility of being 'mistakes' by reason of the student not paying attention to form during speech or writing. On the other hand, errors belonging to discourse, phonology and lexis will often constitute genuine 'errors' and not 'mistakes'. Discourse features are not taught as a rule in practice, and errors in the sound system relate both to cultural identity and to limited exposure to NS input. 'Errors' pertaining to lexis however could reflect ignorance of usage rather than meaning. For correction purposes, the teacher needs to have first hand knowledge of learner IL to help decide whether to overlook particular errors, to correct errors, or to allow learners to focus on form and function for themselves.

The categories delineated under the error gravity level also relate to the issue of correctibility in that both the 'intelligibility' and 'common error' categories typically require corrective treatment at the level of the teacher rather than the peer or the self. Whilst intelligibility category relates to global features of language use, the 'common error' category relates to a widespread misunderstanding of a specific part of the language system. In addition, a teacher will undoubtedly choose to correct errors that she feels are likely to stigmatise the learner (despite problems noted in arriving at such judgements), with the frequency of repeated error tokens as one possible factor in these choices.

The issue of correctibility thus draws together all categorisations of error and relates these to the treatment to be given in a classroom context. Some errors should be given priority treatment and others may be left until a later stage. Where corrective treatment is preferred, the relevant choices are between three possible sources of correction : the self in the monitoring function, the learner's peer(s), and the teacher.

5. Conclusion

The criteria for error correction therefore stem from a very basic conceptual distinction, between 'error' and 'mistake', which should permeate all other categories described above, paving the way for appropriate corrective treatment to follow. The three suggested types of treatment (by self, by peers and by the teacher) also align themselves to the error gravity issue in that the less serious the error, the less attention the teacher needs to pay to correcting the error rather than allowing the students to self-correct or peer-correct. Clearly, the status of a particular error type as genuine error or mistake, for a given student's level of linguistic competence, is also one major consideration when determining error gravity. Conversely, the more serious the error, the more likely it becomes that the teacher needs to correct the error in person. This would be an overall approach which could be adopted for future classroom practice which relates directly to the theoretical distinction discussed in this paper.

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